



THE ALABAMA VETERAN

SUMMER 2022 ISSUE



ADVA

NEWSLETTER

NEWSLETTER
HIGHLIGHTS

Commissioner's Corner · P. 2

Groundbreaking · P. 4

Around the State · P. 6

ADVA

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

*"Proudly Serving
America's Finest"*

COMMISSIONER'S CORNER



COMMISSIONER KENT DAVIS

There isn't enough we can say about the men and women we honor on Memorial Day or the sacrifices they made for the ideals of liberty. We continue to promote liberty, peace, freedom, and prosperity in our country because of the brave acts of these men and women — and that should never be forgotten.

On Memorial Day, as I attended a ceremony at Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home, I naturally reflected on the importance of the day and why it's crucial we continue to acknowledge and appreciate our armed forces. Every service member has made sacrifices — all sacrificed some, some sacrificed all. However, there comes a time when the role of service should change.

As Commissioner of the ADVA, I constantly highlight we are here to serve you from the moment you take off your uniform for the final time through eternity.

I want to emphasize *through eternity*. One way we accomplish this is through the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort. If you haven't been

to the cemetery, it is a beautiful facility that I strongly encourage you visit when you're in South Alabama to pay respects to the Veterans of this great state.

We are proud of the services provided by the cemetery. The facility sits on 107 acres of land in Baldwin County, was dedicated in December 2012, and began interments in April 2013. The initial phase of the cemetery is 22.8 acres and has 2,776 burial sites (2,392 in-ground).

Expansions are planned for every 10 years. In October 2021, ADVA received a \$5 million grant from the National Cemetery Administration, which will fund the first of 10 planned expansions that will serve Alabama Veterans for 100 years.

Construction is expected to begin in August or September 2022 with completion expected within one year of the start date. The expansion will add 2,762 pre-placed vault sites (casket sites), 960 Columbarium niches (above-ground urn sites), 800 in-ground urn sites, and a memorial wall that will include 100 sites. Updates to other expansion infrastructure are also included in the project.

This is an important project and we want to thank the National Cemetery Administration for approving the grant. The cemetery is a beautiful and solemn place for our Veterans and their family members, and we look forward to continual improvements with this project. Again, ADVA serves Alabama's Veterans through eternity, and though death is never an easy topic, we want to guarantee Alabama's heroes receive the resting place they've earned when that day does come.



ADVA

COMMISSIONER

Kent Davis

Wendi Findley—Executive Assistant

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OPERATIONS

Jeff Newton

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

Bob Horton

DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL

Beverly Gebhardt

VETERANS WELL-BEING

Sissy Louise Moore—Program Manager

VETERANS HOMES PROGRAM

Kim Justice—Executive Director

ALABAMA G.I. DEPENDENT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Kayla Kyle—Program Manager

ACCOUNTING

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Brandon Miller—Newsletter Editor

APPEAL & REVIEW DIVISION

Mark Sullivan—Manager

CEMETERY

Tony Ross—Director

FIELD OPERATIONS

Tim Edgil—District I Manager

Rogers Wilson—District II Manager

Lynda Jenkins—District III Manager

HEADQUARTERS RSA UNION

100 North Union Street, Suite 850

Montgomery, AL 36104

Telephone: (334) 242-5077

Fax: (334) 242-5102

MAILING ADDRESS

Alabama Dept. of Veterans Affairs

PO Box 1509

Montgomery, Alabama 36102-1509

INTERNET WEB ADDRESSES

Web: www.va.alabama.gov

E-Mail: adva@va.alabama.gov

CONGRATULATIONS!

ADVA celebrated Coffee County Veterans Service Officer Meria Nelson on her planned retirement at District III training in June.

"Meria joined us 10 years ago and has been a tremendous part of our District III family," said District III Manager Lynda Jenkins. "She always has a welcoming smile and anyone around her can feel the sincerity of her willingness to assist. The Veterans throughout the counties that she provided services to over the years were truly blessed. She will be missed and we wish her all the best as she retires."



Pike County Veterans Service Officer Randy Ross received a 2022 President's Volunteer Service Award in late May in recognition and appreciation for the commitments made to strengthen America and communities through volunteer service. Mr. Ross received the award by the AmeriCorps for his 116 hours of volunteer service.



Several ADVA employees were recognized for milestone anniversaries recently. In May, Angela Smith (left) celebrated 20 years as the administrative support assistant at William F. Green State Veterans Home. In June, Houston County Veterans Service Officer Davy Daughtry (middle) and Butler County Veterans Service Officer Tammie Rice (right) received 15-year service pins.



GROUNDBREAKING

A NEW HOME FOR HEROES

ADVA CELEBRATES GROUNDBREAKING OF NEW STATE VETERANS HOME

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) celebrated the upcoming construction of the Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie G. Adkins State Veterans Home on June 17 with a ceremonial groundbreaking.

ADVA Commissioner Kent Davis and additional ADVA staff were joined by the State Board of Veterans Affairs (SBVA), representatives from the Alabama State Legislature, officials with the City of Enterprise, Coffee County, Fort Rucker, and the Wiregrass community as the new state-of-the-art long-term healthcare facility for Alabama Veterans was recognized.

"The groundbreaking was a wonderful day for the ADVA, State Board of Veterans Affairs, and community," Commissioner Davis said. "We were thrilled to have such a large crowd from the Wiregrass to join us in beginning the process of building the Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie G. Adkins State Veterans Home, which will serve as a wonderful home for many of our nation's heroes in the Wiregrass."



Above: ADVA Commissioner Kent Davis speaks during the groundbreaking ceremony.

Right: The family of Bennie G. Adkins poses for a photo during the groundbreaking.

Far Right: Dr. Keith Adkins talks about his father's legacy.

Below: State Board of Veterans Affairs members and ADVA staff participate during the groundbreaking.



The site of the facility will be on 108 acres off Highway 51 just north of Yancey Parker Industrial Park. This location was chosen largely because of the considerable Veteran population in Coffee County. Studies indicate the county, and Enterprise in particular, will see a significant growth in the Veteran population in coming years.



RABREN GENERAL CONTRACTORS SELECTED TO BUILD NEW STATE VETERANS HOME

The State Board of Veterans Affairs (SBVA) recently selected Rabren General Contractors to build the Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie G. Adkins State Veterans Home in Enterprise. Construction began July 5, and the facility is expected to open in 2024.

"We are grateful to the ADVA for allowing us to be part of such an important project. We look forward to commencing work and building something that will provide a benefit to Enterprise and the Wiregrass community for years to come," said Rabren General Contractors Senior Project Manager Matt Ostendorf.

Rabren General Contractors was established in 2000 and has become one of the largest privately held general contractors in the state of Alabama with experiences in a variety of market segments that include education, multi-family and student living, hospitality, sports and recreation, government, office, healthcare, and more.



From left to right: Sarah Mitchell, Kyle Stover, Sean Whitt, Joel Blackstock of Williams Blackstock Architects, ADVA Executive Director of the State Veterans Home Program Kim Justice, Rabren VP of Preconstruction Ray Harrelson and subcontractor Aaron Adams of Adams Group.

COMMAND SGT. MAJ. BENNIE G. ADKINS STATE VETERANS HOME



VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE OPENS IN COOSA COUNTY

The ADVA took another step on May 26 toward having a Veterans Service Office in all 67 counties by opening an office in Coosa County. ADVA Commissioner Kent Davis, District II Manager Rogers Wilson, Assistant Commissioner of Operations Jeff Newton, Veterans Service Officer Nicole Goodman, and Assistant Veterans Service Officer Carla Bolden were joined by Goodwater Mayor Lonnie Caldwell for a ribbon cutting to commemorate the new office.

ADVA's Veterans Service Offices provide free services, including hands-on assistance in submitting applications for VA compensation & pension claims and assisting with other state and federal benefits and services. The Coosa County office will be open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7:45 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Learn more at va.alabama.gov.



From left to right: ADVA Assistant Commissioner of Operations Jeff Newton, Assistant Veterans Service Officer Carla Bolden, Goodwater Mayor Lonnie Caldwell, ADVA Commissioner Kent Davis, Veterans Service Officer Nicole Goodman, and Probate Judge of Coosa County Richard M. Dean.

ALABAMA VETERANS RECEIVE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMAS DECADES AFTER LEAVING SCHOOL TO JOIN THE MILITARY

Call it a celebration decades in the making! World War II Veteran Clarence Carpenter and Korean War Veteran Hubert Carter each received their high school diplomas earlier this summer after leaving school as teenagers to fight for our great nation.

The special occasions were possible through state legislation that allows school systems to grant a high school diploma to qualifying World War II, Korean War and Vietnam War Veterans who are verified for leaving school before completing graduation to join the military.

Clarke County Veterans Service Officer Rhonda Jackson presented Mr. Carpenter with an ADVA Certificate of Appreciation on May 19 as he also received his high school diploma. Mr. Carpenter, now 95, left high school in 1945 to serve his country by joining the U.S. Navy.

Mr. Carter, now 89, received his high school diploma 72 years later than anticipated. Marion County Veterans Service Officer Marlon Holloway attended the graduation ceremony on May 24 and spoke before Mr. Carter was the first to receive his diploma.

Mr. Carter joined the National Guard in Hamilton before being activated in the Army at the age of 17. He went from Guin, Alabama, to Seattle, before boarding a ship to Korea, where he fought for his country. He spent 18 months in Korea before returning stateside and finishing two years of service in the military.



AMERICAN LEGION AWARDS VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER OF THE YEAR

Shelby County Veterans Service Officer John Jones was awarded C.C. Horton Service Officer of the Year for 2022.

"VSO John Jones is an extremely devoted advocate for Veterans," District II Manager Rogers Wilson said. "He is very approachable and much admired for the service and support his office provides on a consistent basis. John is the complete package; he understands the needs of Veterans and is relentless on their behalf as their County Veterans Service Officer. He is undoubtedly well deserving of this special recognition."



Bill Nichols State Veterans Home Senior Administrative Support Assistant Mary Hopkins was awarded the Irby Powers C.A.S.E. Award.

"I am so proud for Mary Hopkins to achieve this award," said Bill Nichols State Veterans Home Director Kathryn Fuller. "Her dedication over the past 30-plus years to the department and to the Veteran population is exemplary. The world could use more kind and caring people like Mary, not only for her work ethic but for the inspiration she provides to others to assist in any way possible."



STATEWIDE TOUR OF VETERANS WELL-BEING TOWN HALLS MAKES STOP IN MOBILE

The ADVA partnered with the City of Mobile and USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park for an Alabama's Challenge Veterans Town Hall and Resources and Job Fair on May 23.

The two-part event featured an overview of the Veterans well-being initiative from Alabama's Challenge Co-Chairs Paulette Risher and Kent Davis (pictured) and a panel consisting of the ADVA, Alabama Crisis Centers, 988 Crisis Line, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, South Alabama Veterans Council, Veterans Recovery Resources, AltaPointe, and Alabama Suicide Prevention Resources Coalition. Each panelist discussed the services they provide the community.



Future town halls are scheduled for Tuscaloosa, Huntsville, Birmingham, and Montgomery. Learn more at vetsforhope.com.

REMEMBERING OUR NATION'S FALLEN



In partnership with the local community, the ADVA commemorated the sacrifices of the men and women who have died while defending our liberties on Memorial Day during a ceremony at the **Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort**.

The commemoration featured a wreath-laying ceremony, accompanied by folding of an American flag, a moment of silence followed by a rifle volley, the playing of Taps, and an Honor Guard salute. The cemetery also had an American flag at the grave of each fallen Alabama Veteran, which were placed by local members of the Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts of America.



The Alabama Poppy Project honored our nation's fallen heroes with handmade ceramic poppies placed on a metal stake. The display was located in a field near Heritage Park in Prattville, commemorating those fallen men and women for one week starting on Friday May 27, 2022 (National Poppy Day) through the following Saturday, June 4, 2022. Each year, white ribbons displaying the names of the fallen are tied to various poppies, dedicated by loved ones in their honor.



Pennington Park in Dadeville was filled with more than 2,000 American flags to honor local Veterans as part of Memorial Day festivities.

Park owners Kurt and Leigh Pfitzner joined dozens of Dadeville residents planting flags across the park as a tribute to those who died defending our freedoms.

"I felt I needed to memorialize the park for Memorial Day. Little did we know, however, that it was going to garner an extraordinary amount of attention with people coming for hours, just looking at the flags. We know we have something special," Kurt Pfitzner said.